



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

NIH News

National Institutes of Health

For Immediate Release

4/25/2007

[National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute \(NHLBI\)](#)

CONTACT:

NHLBI Communications Office
301 496-4236
[E-mail:](mailto:nhlbi_news@nhlbi.nih.gov) nhlbi_news@nhlbi.nih.gov

NIH Launches We Can! City Program

South Bend and Gary, Indiana, and Roswell, Georgia, Are First To Be Named We Can! Cities Committed to Nationwide Effort to Prevent Childhood Overweight

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has established the *We Can!* City Program to assist towns and cities across the nation in mobilizing their communities to prevent childhood overweight. *We Can!* (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition) is a national education program developed by the NIH, a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to help youth ages 8-13 maintain a healthy weight.

The first three cities to be selected for the program are:

- [South Bend, Indiana](#)
- [Gary, Indiana](#)
- [Roswell, Georgia](#)

NIH officials will present the mayor of each of the three inaugural cities a specially designed road sign: "[We Can! CityUSA](#) – Working with the National Institutes of Health to promote healthy weight, healthy children." The presentations are part of two-day regional events hosted by the NIH and local *We Can!* community sites in Indiana (April 30-May 1) and Georgia (May 3-4). Each event will be attended by 150 community leaders from more than a dozen states. The events will showcase the local efforts and feature national experts on the science-based curricula developed for youth and for parents to promote healthy lifestyles.

"The National Institutes of Health developed *We Can!* to bring to our communities research-

based information and strategies to teach children how to adopt behaviors that can help them maintain a healthy weight," notes NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, M.D. "Through the efforts of communities like South Bend, Gary, and Roswell, we can make a difference."

As part of the *We Can!* City Program, NIH will provide technical assistance on planning and implementing *We Can!* in the participating cities, as well as materials such as parent handbooks, posters, videos, and the one-stop resource "*We Can!* Energize Our Community: Toolkit for Action." Each city has pledged to offer *We Can!* evidence-based obesity prevention programs to both parents and youth in collaboration with community-based partners. In addition, each city will distribute *We Can!* tips and information to city employees.

Childhood overweight is a growing national epidemic. The percentage of children and teens who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years, and today one in three children ages 2-19 are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Like adults, overweight youth are at risk for health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, and asthma.

To help address these issues, the [National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#) developed *We Can!* in collaboration with three other NIH institutes: the [National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#); the [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#); and the [National Cancer Institute](#). The program offers parents, health professionals, youth, and community groups evidence-based programs and activities to help children ages 8-13 maintain a healthy weight.

We Can! focuses on *three* important behaviors: *improved* food choices, *increased* physical activity and *reduced* recreational screen time. For example, a curriculum for parents provides strategies for maintaining "energy balance," or the long-term balance between energy in (calories from food) and energy out (calories used through activity). Three curricula for youth teach important concepts such as controlling portion size, reading food labels, learning new physical activities, "weaning the screen" to reduce sedentary time, and learning how media can influence their food and physical activity choices.

When *We Can!* launched in June 2005, 14 Intensive Community Sites, including the three inaugural *We Can!* Cities, were selected by the NIH to pilot the nationwide program. Today, 173 communities in 39 states have joined the *We Can!* effort as a *We Can!* community site. The *We Can!* City program extends communities' efforts in towns and cities committing to improving the health and well being of their youth by preventing childhood obesity.

For more information on *We Can!*, visit <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call toll-free 1-866-35-WeCan.

See the *We Can!* CityUSA sign at http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov/downloads/wecan_city_sign.pdf.

For *We Can!* news releases, visit <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/news/press.htm>.

###

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

[NHLBI News Room](#)

[List of all NHLBI Press Releases](#)

[NHLBI HOME](#) · [ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION](#) · [NHLBI SITE INDEX](#) · [PRIVACY STATEMENT](#) · [FOIA](#) · [CONTACT NHLBI](#)



[Department of Health
and Human Services](#)



[National
Institutes of
Health](#)



[National Heart,
Lung, and
Blood Institute](#)